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Airlift Is Set To Bring Back 1,113 Captives

First Arrivals Due in Miami This Morning

By JERRY O'LEARY, JR.
Star Staff Writer

MIAMI, Dec. 22.—The Cubans who staged the hopeless invasion of the Bay of Pigs 20 months ago were to begin returning to freedom tomorrow.

Everything is ready for the arrival here of the 1,113

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young Cubans who have survived Castro's Russian guns and prisons. Miami's nearly 200,000 Cuban exiles are in a mounting ecstasy of excitement at the prospect of seeing their beloved "muchachos."

A State Department official here tonight said the first Pan American Airways plane would leave for Havana at 5 a.m. tomorrow, loaded with some of the food and drugs that will make up the ransom for the captives.

Two more planes were to leave from here at 6 and 6:30 a.m. to begin the airlift shuttle that will continue until all of the prisoners have been returned. The first of the two shuttle planes is expected back in Miami about 8:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Mr. Castro has signed an agreement with Attorney James B. Donovan, negotiator for the Cuban Families Committee, consenting to release the prisoners in exchange for an estimated \$53 million in medical supplies and foods.

Ship Sails

At Port Everglades, Fla., the S.S. African Pilot, bearing the internationally known symbol of mercy — the Red Cross— sailed for Havana at 9:41 tonight, loaded with about \$11 million of medicine and food.

Steaming at 15½ knots, the 460-foot freighter was expected to arrive in Havana in 14 hours.

Security was tightened around the ship this afternoon

after a Miami businessman, Douglas R. Voorhees, protested shipment of the goods to Cuba and attempted to throw a box of medicine into the harbor.

Donovan Signs First

Mr. Donovan, who also negotiated the exchange with the Russians of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers for Soviet spy Rudolf Abel, told the committee by telephone from Havana that he signed the pact first. Then Mr. Castro took the documents away with him and held them for several hours before signing them, Mr. Donovan reported.

Twice before, in August and again October, Mr. Castro seemed on the verge of agreeing to exchange the prisoners and then broke off the talks. This time it seemed to be only a question of whether the release would occur tomorrow or Monday.

Havana radio said flatly today the release would not take place until Monday, but specu-

lation here was that Castro was tossing a red herring into the complex agreement either through mere perversity or to keep his volatile citizenry out of the way when the prison gates open.

State and Justice Department officials, as well as representatives of Dade County, Fla., and the American Red Cross, have set up headquarters at Homestead. The first plane will return with a contingent of between 98 and 108 men of Assault Brigade 2506.

One Plane at a Time

Officials said only one plane will be on the ground at a time in the Cuban capital during the shuttle. The flight from Florida to Havana takes 40 minutes for a propeller-driven D-C6B. Turn-around time at Homestead will be about 35 minutes, but it is unpredictable how long it will take each plane to clear Havana. Estimates of the number of planes to be used range from two to six.

Every effort will be made to complete the airlift in one day, but it might run into a second day since the mission calls for no night flying, officials said. Pan American has offered its planes for the mercy flights free of charge, it was understood.

Still hanging over the preparation was uneasy speculation that Mr. Castro might turn the exchange into another cliff-hanger through unwillingness to exchange all of the prisoners for only a part of the ransom.

This possibility seemed unlikely, however, since three of Mr. Castro's doctors were permitted by this Government to

the cargo yesterday. The trio flew home this morning, seemingly well pleased with what they saw on African Pilot.

Quick Processing

When the prisoners arrive at Homestead, they will be processed as quickly as possible according to Government sources. They will be screened by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and will receive physical checkups from both United States and Florida health authorities. Those who are sick will be taken directly to Miami hospitals, where beds already have been reserved.

Each man will be given a change of underwear, a short-sleeved shirt and khaki trousers. He also will receive a small amount of cash, probably \$60, as every Cuban refugee does when he seeks asylum in this country. This money comes from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Then the prisoners will be given a hot meal at Homestead—not too big a meal because they have been on near-starvation rations in Castro's jails and too much food might

After they have eaten, the men will board buses and be driven to Dinner Key in the Coconut Grove section of Miami, where there is a huge auditorium with a large parking area. It is here that virtually every Cuban exile in Florida is expected to stage an uproarious welcome for the men they have come to idolize.

No relatives, sweethearts or friends of the invasion force will be permitted to enter Homestead. Their first sight of the returnees will be at Dinner Key.

Leon Levine, public relations man for a New York firm, said Committee Chairman Alvaro Sanchez, Jr., was allowed to tell the prisoners at Mr. Castro's prison on the Isle of Pines by telephone they were about to be released.

Mr. Sanchez and another negotiator, Mrs. Virginia Betancourt, also were allowed to meet with 14 of the prisoners at the Castillo el Principe Prison in Havana to tell the 900 others there of the eminent release.

"They reacted excitedly and rushed away to tell the others," Mr. Sanchez reported by phone from Havana.

Mr. Donovan is expected to return to Miami with the last



Douglas R. Voorhees, of Miami, is restrained by Coast Guardsmen at Port Everglades yesterday as he attempted to stop the loading of food and drugs bound for Cuba in the prisoner exchange.—AP Wirephoto.